

## Faith and Trust

Lesson for January 14, 2024

### Unit II: Learning about Faith

**Adult Topic:** Wise Beyond Your Years

**Background Scripture:** Proverbs 3:1-12

**Printed Text:** Proverbs 3:1-8

**Key verse:** *“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.”*  
(Proverbs 3:5, NIV)

There was a little boy who came home from his first day of school, dropped his little backpack and quickly settled into his summertime, life-of-ease routine. His mother said, “Do you have any homework for class tomorrow?” He looked at her with disbelief, and said, “I have to go back tomorrow?”

We laugh at the child who can't understand the years-long nature of the educational process, but somehow think we can check in with God on the day of crisis and come away with a lifetime of understanding.

Wisdom is very much like the educational process. In fact, wisdom is the goal of education. It takes years of day-to-day studies, years of reading, learning new skills, and applying those skills in ever-new ways.

Godly wisdom will have to use the tools of faith in a proactive journey simply to prepare for the day of crisis. This is the message of this week's lesson.

### Key Terms

1. **Favor** (verse 4) – Finding favor means gaining approval, acceptance, or special benefits or blessings. There is also a close association among favor, grace, and mercy, which are sometimes used to translate the same Hebrew and Greek words.
2. **Heart** (verse 1) – “Heart” occurs over one thousand times in the Bible, making it the most common anthropological term in the Scripture. It denotes a person's center for both physical and emotional-intellectual-moral activities; sometimes it is used figuratively for any inaccessible thing.
3. **Law** (verse 1) –The usual Hebrew term translated as "law" is *tora*. *Tora*, used 220 times in the Old Testament, more specifically means “instruction.”
4. **Lean** (verse 5) – To rely for support or inspiration; support oneself; rely on.

5. **Mercy** (verse 3) – Several Hebrew and Greek terms lie behind the English term "mercy." The chief Hebrew term is *hesed*, God's covenant "lovingkindness." It is a concept integral to an understanding of God's dealings with humankind. In English translations of the Bible, it comes to expression in phrases such as "to be merciful", "to have mercy on", or "to show mercy toward." The corresponding term, "merciful," describes a quality of God and one that God requires of his people. The noun denotes compassion and love, not just feelings or emotions, as expressed in tangible ways.
6. **Peace** (verse 2) – In English, the word "peace" conjures up a passive picture, one showing an absence of civil disturbance or hostilities, or a personality free from internal and external strife. The biblical concept of peace is larger than that and rests heavily on the Hebrew root *slm*, which means "to be complete" or "to be sound."

## Lesson Background

Proverbs pulls together the most important 513 of the over 3,000 proverbs pondered by Solomon (1 Kings 4:32; Ecclesiastes 12:9), along with some proverbs of others whom Solomon likely influenced. The word "proverb" means "to be like", thus Proverbs is a book of comparisons between common, concrete images and life's most profound truths. Proverbs are simple, moral statements (or illustrations), that highlight and teach fundamental realities about life. Solomon sought God's wisdom (2 Chronicles 1:8-12), and offered "pithy sayings" designed to make men contemplate:

1. The fear of God; and
2. Living by His wisdom (1:7; 9:10).

The sum of this wisdom is personified in the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:30). Since Proverbs is Wisdom literature, by nature it is sometimes difficult to understand (1:6). Wisdom literature is part of the whole of Old Testament truth; the Priest gave the law, the Prophet gave a Word from the Lord, and the Sage (or wise man), gave his wise Counsel (Jeremiah 18:18; Ezekiel 7:26). In proverbs, Solomon the Sage gives insight into the "knotty" issues of life (1:6), which are not directly addressed in the Law or the Prophets. Though it is practical, Proverbs is not superficial or external because it contains moral and ethical elements stressing upright living which flow out of a right relationship with God.

## Lesson in Depth

### I. Wake Up and Pay Attention (Proverbs 3:1-4)

In the first four verses of Proverbs 3, Solomon suggests that we can walk rightly with God just by valuing His Word.

**Do not forget my law:** Solomon's advice as a father to his son in this section begins with a warning to never forget God's word (**my law**). Solomon didn't mean "**my law**" in the sense of his own personal decrees, but as God's word that he had internalized and made personal.

**Let your heart keep my commands:** Deciding to not **forget** God's word is more than a mental exercise of memory. It is also connected to a life of obedience, in which one does keep the commands of God. If one mentally remembers God's word yet fails to obey it, we could rightly say he or she has *forgotten* God's **commands**.

This obedience is one of the **heart**. Our goal in obedience is not mere outward conformity to God's will, but a heart that loves and obeys Him. "The heart is the first thing that wanders away from God, and it is also the first thing that returns to God." (Bridges)

**They will add to you:** There is a real benefit from this life and heart that obeys God. In principle, life and heart obedience bring long life and peace. This is a blessed combination; length of days could be a curse and not a blessing without peace. We say *in principle* because this is largely how Proverbs was written and should be regarded. The principle of Proverbs 3:2 is not an absolute promise; there are some people who truly are given to obedience in both conduct and heart and die relatively young. Some godly persons have trouble living in peace. We regard these as true principles, not absolute promises.

**Let not mercy and truth forsake you:** Solomon wisely told his son to keep God's loyal love (**mercy**, the great Hebrew word *hesed*) and truth close. They should be so close that it would be as if they were a necklace on him at all times (bind them around your neck) and written on the tablet of your heart.

**Bind them...write them:** "Striking expressions for glorying in, meditating on and (Proverbs 7:3) acting by these principles." (Kidner) "By 'binding' and 'writing' the teacher is stressing that the teachings become a part of the disciple's nature." (Ross)

**So find favor:** The blessed, obedient life is magnetic. It enjoys the **favor** of the God it honors and attracts the **favor** of man.

"*Favor* (*hen*, see Proverbs 1:9), the common word for 'grace,' here denotes the positive disposition of heaven and earth toward the son because of his attractiveness. Like *hesed*, it cannot be compelled; it is extended voluntarily and unilaterally to preserve a valued relationship." (Waltke)

"This means that others will recognize the competence and intelligence of the wise individual." (Garrett)

## II. Behave Wisely (Proverbs 3:5-8)

**Trust in the LORD:** Solomon advised his son to live a life of trust in Yahweh. Solomon had found that God was *worthy* to be trusted. It is our nature to put our trust in something or someone, even if it is our self. Solomon told us to consciously put our trust in the LORD, the covenant God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

“The word translated ‘trust’ in Proverbs 3:5 means ‘to lie helpless, facedown.’ It pictures a servant waiting for the master’s command in readiness to obey, or a defeated soldier yielding himself to the conquering general.” (Wiersbe)

**With all your heart:** If trust in God is to be true, it must be complete. To put half our trust in God and half our trust in self or something else is really failure to trust the LORD at all. We should endeavor to give God all our conscious trust.

“They trust not God at all that do it not alone. He that stands with one foot on a rock, and another foot upon a quicksand, will sink and perish as certainly as he that stands with both feet on a quicksand.” (Trapp)

This aspect troubles some because they fear there is some part of their *heart* that is not truly trusting God. We may sympathize with this concern, knowing that as imperfect people it is impossible for us to trust in the LORD perfectly. In principle, we gather that Proverbs 3:5-6 does not describe an objectively *perfect* trust in God, but a heart and life that does not consciously reject or defy God with unbelief.

The following phrases will explain what Solomon intended with the phrase **with all your heart**.

“This trust is not the mere cold assent of enlightened judgment. It is trust...with all your heart. It is a childlike, unwavering confidence in our Father’s well-proved wisdom, faithfulness, and love.” (Bridges)

**Lean not on your own understanding:** Trusting God with all our heart means to decide to put away our own understanding and instead to choose to trust God and His understanding, especially as declared in His word.

**Lean not:** “*Do not rely*, or lean as on a broken crutch, depicts what is meant by ‘trust.’” (Waltke)

“It is on GOD, not on *thyself*, that thou art commanded to *depend*. He who trusts in his own heart is a fool.... *Self-sufficiency* and *self-dependence* have been the ruin of mankind ever since the fall of Adam. The grand sin of the human race is their continual endeavor to *live independently of God*.” (Clarke)

**In all your ways acknowledge Him:** Trusting God with all our heart means to honor and acknowledge Him in all that we do. It is the choice to “invite” God into our everyday life and conduct. It is to practice the presence of God in the regular and sometimes mundane things that happen every day.

**In all your ways acknowledge:** “Ask counsel at his mouth, aim at his glory, be evermore in the sense of his presence, and light of his countenance.” (Trapp)

**He shall direct your paths:** This is the great principle of God’s response towards those who trust Him in the way described in the previous lines. When we acknowledge Him in our ways, He will **direct** our **paths** in the fulfillment of His will, into what is right before Him and pleasing to us.

More than a few are *afraid* to have God **direct** their **paths**. They would much rather direct themselves! This, fundamentally, is the heart that *does not* trust in the LORD with all the heart. The surrendered heart delights in God's direction and in God's paths.

One of the most frequently asked questions among believers is, "How can I know the will of God?" In principle, Solomon gave a wonderful answer in Proverbs 3:5-6. When we:

- Decide to put our trust in the LORD.
- Decide to not trust in our own understanding, but give attention and priority to God's revealed word.
- Decide to acknowledge and honor God in all that we do.

When we do those things, we can trust that God will **direct** our **paths**. We can go forward in peace, believing that through His word, through the leading of the Holy Spirit, through the counsel of others, through godly common sense, and through life circumstances, God will direct our paths. We will walk along our way of life and come to see that we have been on the path God intended all along.

**Do not be wise in your own eyes:** We can regard this as an explanation of what it means to lean on one's own understanding (Proverbs 3:5). It is to regard *our* wisdom as better and greater than God's.

**Do not be wise in your own eyes:** "Be not puffed up with vain conceit of thine own wisdom, as if that were sufficient for the conduct of all thine affairs without direction or assistance from God, or without the advice of others." (Poole)

**Fear the LORD and depart from evil:** This is the natural result of trusting God. As we trust Him, we come to know Him better, leading to natural reverence and awe (to fear the LORD). As we trust Him, we are drawn more to God and further **from evil**.

**It will be health to your flesh:** A life of surrender and trust in God has real benefits to the health of the trusting one. It gives a greater sense of peace and strength that one would not have *apart* from a life of trust and surrender to God.

**Flesh** is literally *navel* and is usually taken as a center point referring to the entire body.

## Lesson Summary

This week's lesson "challenges believers to assess how consistently they are following Solomon's timeless advice on embracing godly wisdom (Pathways, p. 47). Key lessons that can be derived from these verses:

### 1. Listen to Instruction

"My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments."

The passage emphasizes the importance of listening to and remembering the teachings and commandments. This encourages individuals to be receptive to wisdom and guidance from others, especially from those with experience and knowledge.

### 2. Favor and Understanding

"For length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you."

By following the teachings and commandments, one can expect a life characterized by length, prosperity, and peace. This suggests that living in accordance with moral and wise principles can lead to a more fulfilling and successful life.

### 3. Trust in the Lord

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding."

This verse underscores the importance of placing trust in a higher power, acknowledging the limitations of human understanding. It encourages individuals to rely on divine wisdom and guidance rather than solely depending on their own reasoning.

### 4. Acknowledge God in Your Ways

"In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."

This verse reinforces the idea of involving God in every aspect of life. By acknowledging and seeking divine guidance in all endeavors, individuals can expect a clearer and more straightforward path.

### 5. Wisdom and Health

"Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones."

Rejecting arrogance and pride, and instead, fearing the Lord and avoiding evil, is associated with physical and spiritual well-being. This suggests a connection between moral behavior and overall health.

### 6. Generosity and Abundance

"Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine."

This verse encourages generosity and giving, highlighting the concept that honoring God with one's resources can lead to abundance and prosperity.

### 7. Discipline and Correction

"My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights."

Embracing discipline and correction is seen as a sign of love and care. This suggests that challenges and corrections in life can be opportunities for growth and improvement.

In summary, Proverbs 3:1-8 imparts valuable lessons about the importance of listening to instruction, trusting in the Lord, acknowledging God in all aspects of life, embracing wisdom, and living a morally upright and disciplined life. These principles are intended to guide Christians toward a path of fulfillment, prosperity, and spiritual well-being.